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STATE PASS DEPARTMENT OF LABOR FOR CRISPIN RIGBY AND CHARLOTTE
PONTICELLI

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SUBJ: Labor Secretary Chao Attends North American Agreement of
Labor Cooperation Meeting in Ottawa

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, Canadian Labor Minister Jean-Pierre Blackburn, and Mexican Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare Javier Lozano Alarcsn attended a Ministerial meeting of the North American Agreement of Labor Cooperation (NAALC) in Ottawa on April 23-23. The meeting provided the three NAALC Ministers the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the NAALC and NAFTA, to discuss future priorities for the Secretariat of the Commission for Labor Cooperation, and to sign a joint declaration resolving a public communication filed in 2003 concerning freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in Puebla, Mexico. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The U.S. Secretary of Labor and her Canadian and Mexican counterparts held the Eighth Regular Session of the North American Agreement of Labor Cooperation (NAALC) Council of Ministers in Ottawa, Canada on April 23-24. The meeting took place in a very positive atmosphere. The Ministers reached consensus on all matters under discussion and provided concrete guidance to the Secretariat staff, which was represented by incoming Executive Director Daniel Bernier and Director of Administration Gabriel Jimenez. The Ministers agreed to hold these meetings annually in the future. The Seventh Session of the Council of Ministers was held in Washington on November 13, 2003.

¶3. (U) Secretary Chao reaffirmed the United States' commitment to the NAALC and emphasized the benefits that each of the three North American countries have enjoyed as a result of NAFTA.

¶4. (U) Scott Streiner, the Council Designee from Canada, delivered a presentation on future priorities for the Commission of Labor Cooperation. He presented the Ministers with possible topics for cooperative activities and research to be undertaken by the Secretariat and proposed an increased commitment to more efficient handling of public communications under the NAALC. In addition to approving current plans to pursue cooperative activities on youth employment and mine safety, the Ministers expressed interest in activities focusing on workplace protections for vulnerable workers, addressing the employment challenges of new and emerging technologies such as biofuels, and producing materials on the benefits of trade. There was also discussion on the topic of labor law reform, which is of particular relevance in Mexico.

¶5. (U) The Ministers agreed that they would make every effort to resolve public communication cases within one year of the filing of a complaint with the National Administrative Offices. The meeting concluded with the signing of the joint declaration resolving the "Puebla case." The declaration mandates the Secretariat to develop a variety of reports and informational materials concerning procedures to resolve unjust dismissal complaints, processes for registration of unions, and access to collective bargaining agreements. The Mexican authorities committed to host a government-to-government session in Puebla with federal and state authorities to exchange information on best practices on the

subjects noted above. This session is to be followed by a seminar, which will include other relevant stakeholders. The joint declaration calls for a plan of action to be developed within 90 days (July 2008) and to complete planned activities within 15 months (July 2009).

¶6. (U) The Secretary said that private ballot elections in union formation and the selection of collective bargaining representatives is an important protection for workers. Mexico and Canada provided their views on this issue and the Ministers agreed to charge their Council Designees to hold discussions on the issue, with the possibility of requesting further examination of the topic by the Secretariat in the future.

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